



Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

Kennecott

In June of 1998, the National Park Service acquired many of the significant buildings and lands of the historic mining town of Kennecott. Designated as a National Historic Landmark since 1978, Kennecott is considered the best remaining example of early 20th Century copper mining.



The Kennecott Story

Kennecott is an extraordinary piece of history in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The impressive structures that remain at the mill site and mines represent an ambitious time of exploration and discovery in Alaska and a feat of human ingenuity and perseverance in the face of extreme environmental challenge. Kennecott's high grade copper ore, previously known and used by the region's Ahtna native population, was among the richest deposits ever found in United States mining history. Looking up at Bonanza Ridge to the northeast of the present townsite, a visitor can note an abrupt change in rock color at approximately 6,000 feet in elevation. This contour line marks the contact between the Chitistone Limestone (light-colored sedimentary rock above) and the Nikolai Greenstone (dark-colored metamorphosed basalt below). It is this limestone-greenstone contact that USGS geologists noted and reported around 1899 as the dominate structure along which copper ore bodies formed.

In the summer of 1900, prospectors Clarence Warner and "Tarantula Jack" Smith were exploring the east edge of the Kennicott Glacier with this valuable information. As the pair drew closer to the limestone-greenstone contact, they could not miss the magnificent green cliffs of copper exposed on the mountainside. Their discovery, staked as the "Bonanza Mine Outcrop", was sampled revealing up to 70% pure

chalcocite copper, a good measure of silver, and a trace of gold. Stephen Birch, an ambitious young mining engineer, eventually purchased this valuable, yet challengingly remote, claim. Securing the financial backing of some of the most influential families of the time, Birch formed the Alaska Syndicate. This group, which included the Morgans and Guggenheims, became the Kennecott Copper Corporation in 1915. Along with building the mine and mill works, the corporation controlled the entire transportation route, funding the 196-mile Copper River and Northwestern Railway from Kennecott to Cordova and organizing a steamship line that shipped the ore to the smelters in Tacoma, Washington. *Note: The mining company was named after the Kennicott Glacier. However, it was misspelled as Kennecott, with an "e", resulting in spelling debates that continue today.*

Successfully meeting countless challenges posed by the extreme Alaska setting, this system of mining and transport engineering operated from 1911, when the railroad was completed, until 1938, when the high grade copper veins were depleted. The total value of the copper extracted was approximately \$200 million. Capital generated from the operation went on to stimulate mining endeavors in other parts of the United States and South America. Kennecott Copper Corporation remains an important name in the international mining community today.

Kennecott became a self-contained company town, complete with a hospital, general store, schoolhouse, baseball field, skating rink, tennis court, recreation hall and dairy.

Following the boom-bust pattern common to mining economies across the American west, Kennecott became a ghost town soon after the last train pulled out in November of 1938. It was not until the late 60's and 70's that the area was rediscovered by surface mining interests and adventuresome Alaskans attracted to the remote and scenic wilderness setting. The creation of the surrounding Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in 1980 helped stimulate the growth in tourism that shapes the town today.



Be Careful

The historic buildings in Kennecott are in a state of collapse and disrepair. Since 1999 the National Park Service has been working to improve visitor safety at the mill site through architectural stabilization and lead paint abatement. At this time the doors of the buildings are locked. Local guiding companies have permission to lead groups through the safer parts of buildings. Feel free to explore the outside of the buildings, but remain aware of hazards that still exist.

- Debris is scattered about the area. Watch under foot for sharp or loose objects such as glass, metal scraps or nails. Avoid the steep slopes where loose debris is present.
- Please keep to the gravel paths. Do not attempt to walk on decks or stairs attached to the buildings. Many of these areas are in need of repair.
- The Kennecott Corporation conducted hazardous materials clean up of asbestos, oils and other materials from 1990-1993. Lead contamination is still present in the paint covering the buildings. If hiking to one of the mine sites up the mountain, be aware that these hazards exist.
- Abandoned explosives may be present and in unstable condition. Never handle dynamite blasting caps, or any potentially explosive products. Please notify the National Park Service if you see signs of such explosives.

Due to the multiple hazards, please keep a close eye on children in the area.

Do Not Remove Historic Artifacts

Historic artifacts are public property. If you stumble upon pieces of the Kennecott history, including small artifacts that you find along the way, please leave them for others to enjoy.



We hope you enjoy your visit to Kennecott!

Camping

At this time there is no camping in the mill site area. There is informal camping available just beyond Jumbo Creek of the Root Glacier trail. There is also camping available at the end of the McCarthy Road.

Root Glacier Trail

Follow the trail that goes north of the Kennecott town site. The trail eventually curves to the right and comes upon another trail. Turn left onto that trail and follow it as you walk along the lateral moraine of the Kennicott and Root Glaciers. After approximately a quarter mile, cross Bonanza Creek on the footbridge. After approximately a mile, the trail curves sharply to the right and upstream. Here, cross Jumbo Creek on a footbridge. Primitive campsites, along with outhouse and food lockers, are available in this area. If you wish to access the glacier, turn left at the sign and follow the trail as it winds down the moraine to the toe of the glacier. If you decide to walk on the glacier, please use extreme caution, as the ice can be very slippery and dangerous.



-Kennecott Town Map-

Please remember to respect private property.

Although the National Park Service recently purchased much of Kennecott and the adjacent lands, there are a number of private homes and businesses within these new park boundaries. Please take the time to look at the map and note which buildings are privately owned. These buildings may be inhabited. There is also some private land above the mill site. If you stumble upon an unmarked trail it may be the entrance to a private home. Please respect the privacy of the local residents. These private lands are treated the same as any private property outside of the Park/Preserve boundary.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Concentration Mill | 13. Carpentry Shop (ruin) |
| 2. Ammonia Leaching Plant | 14. General Store |
| 3. Power Plant | 15. Refrigeration Plant |
| 4. Machine Shop | 16. West Bunkhouse |
| 5. Electrical Shop | 17. School House |
| 6. Storage Sheds | 18. Bath House |
| 7. General Manager's Office | 19. Recreation Hall |
| 8. Hospital | 20. Coal Bunker |
| 9. Assay Office | 21. Dairy Barn |
| 10. East Bunkhouse | 22. Cottages |
| 11. National Creek Bunkhouse | 23. Tennis Court (ruin) |
| 12. Train Depot | 24. Kennicott Glacier Lodge |

Bold-faced selections are NPS Property.

